

# The Wings of the Morning

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## CHAPTER IV.

**A**CROSS the parched bones lay the stick discarded by Jenks in his alarm. He picked it up and resumed his progress along the pathway. So closely did he now examine the ground that he hardly noted the direction. The track led straight toward the wall of rock. The distance was not great—about forty yards. At first the brushwood impeded him, but soon even this hindrance disappeared, and a well defined passage meandered through a belt of trees, some strong and lofty, others quite immature.

More bushes gathered at the foot of the cliff. Behind them he could see the mouth of a cave. The six months' old growth of vegetation about the entrance gave clear indication as to the time which had elapsed since a human foot last disturbed the solitude.

A few vigorous blows with the stick cleared away obstructing plants and leafy branches. The sailor stooped and looked into the cavern, for the opening was barely five feet high. He perceived instantly that the excavation was man's handiwork applied to a fault in the hard rock. A sort of natural shaft existed, and this had been extended by manual labor. Beyond the entrance the cave became more lofty. Owing to its position with reference to the sun at that hour Jenks imagined that sufficient light would be obtainable when the tropical luxuriance of foliage outside was dispensed with.

At present the interior was dark. With the stick he tapped the walls and roof. A startled chuck and the rush of wings heralded the flight of two birds alarmed by the noise. Soon his eyes, more accustomed to the gloom, made out that the place was about thirty feet deep, ten feet wide in the center and seven or eight feet high.

At the farther end was a collection of objects inviting prompt attention. Each moment he could see with greater distinctness. Kneeling on one side of the little pile, he discerned that on a large stone serving as a rude bench were some tin utensils, some knives, a sextant and a quantity of empty cartridge cases. Between the stone and what a miner terms the "face" of the rock was a four foot space. Here, half imbedded in the sand which covered the floor, were two pickaxes, a shovel, a sledge hammer, a fine timber felling ax and three crowbars.

In the darkest corner of the cave's extremity the "wall" appeared to be very smooth. He prodded with the stick, and there was a sharp clang of tin. He discovered six square keystone oil cases carefully stacked up. Three were empty, one seemed to be half full, and the contents of two were untouched. With almost feverish haste he ascertained that the half filled tin did really contain oil.

"What a find!" he ejaculated aloud. So far as he could judge, the cave harbored no further surprises. Returning toward the exit, his boots dislodged more empty cartridges from the sand. They were shells adapted to a revolver of heavy caliber. At a short distance from the doorway they were present in dozens.

"The remnants of a fight," he thought. "The man was attacked and defended himself here. Not expecting the arrival of enemies, he provided no store of food or water. He was killed while trying to reach the well, probably at night."

He vividly pictured the scene—a brave, hardy European keeping at bay a host of Dyak savages, enduring manfully the agonies of hunger, thirst, perhaps wounds; then the siege, followed by a wild effort to gain the life giving well, the hiss of a Malay parang wielded by a lurking foe and the last despairing struggle before death came. He might be mistaken. Perhaps there was a less dramatic explanation. But he could not shake off his first impressions.

"What was the poor devil doing here?" he asked. "Why did he bury himself in this rock, with mining utensils and a few rough stores? He could not be a castaway. There is the indication of purpose, of preparation, of method combined with ignorance, for none who knew the ways of Dyaks and Chinese pirates would venture to live here alone if he could help it, and if he really were alone."

There was relief in hearing his own voice. He could hum and think and act. Arming himself with the ax, he attacked the bushes and branches of trees in front of the cave. He cut a fresh approach to the well and threw the litter over the skeleton. At first he was inclined to bury it where it lay, but he disliked the idea of Iris walking unconsciously over the place. No time could be wasted that day. He would seize an early opportunity to get on his gravenigger.

After an absence of little more than an hour he rejoined the girl. She saw him from afar and wondered when he obtained the ax he shouldered.

"You are a successful explorer," she cried when he drew near.

"Yes, Miss Deane, I have found water, implements, a shelter, even light."

"What sort of light?"

"Oil."

"And the shelter—is it a house?"

"No, a cave. If you are sufficiently rested you might come and take possession."

Her eyes danced with excitement. He told her what he had seen, with reservations, and she ran on before him to witness these marvels.

"Why did you make a new path to the well?" she inquired after a rapid survey.

"A new path?" The pertinent question staggered him.

"Yes, the people who lived here must have had some sort of free passage."

He lied easily. "I have only cleared away recent growth," he said.

"And why did you dig a cave? It surely would be much more simple to build a house from all these trees."

"There you puzzle me," he said frankly.

They had entered the cavern but a little way and now came out. "These empty cartridges are funny. They suggest a fort, a battle." Womanlike, her words were carelessly chattered, but they were crammed with inductive force.

Embarked on the toboggan slope of untruth, the sailor slid smoothly downward.

"Events have colored your imagination, Miss Deane. Even in England men often preserve such things for future use. They can be reloaded."

"Yes, I have seen keepers do that. This is different. There is an air of—"

"There is a lot to be done," broke in Jenks emphatically. "We must climb the hill and get back here in time to light another fire before the sun goes down. I want to prop a canvas sheet in front of the cave and try to devise a lamp."

"Must I sleep inside?" demanded Iris. "Yes, where else?"

There was a pause, a mere whiff of awkwardness.

"I will mount guard outside," went on Jenks. He was trying to improve the edge of the ax by grinding it on a soft stone.

The girl went into the cave again. She was inquisitive, uneasy.

"That arrangement!"—she began, but ended in a sharp cry of terror. The dispossessed birds had returned during the sailor's absence.

"I will kill them!" he shouted in anger.

"Please don't. There has been enough of death in this place already."

The words jarred on his ears. Then he felt that she could only allude to the victims of the wreck.

"It was going to say," she explained, "that we must devise a partition. There is no help for it until you construct a sort of house. Candidly, I do not like this hole in the rock. It is a vault, a tomb."

"You told me that I was in command, yet you dispute my orders." He strove hard to appear brusquely good humored, indifferent, though for one of his mold he was absurdly irritable. The cause was overstrain, but that explanation escaped him.

"Quite true. But if sleeping in the cold, in dew or rain, is bad for me, it must be equally bad for you, and without you I am helpless, you know."

He laughed sardonically, and the harsh note clashed with her frank candor. Here at least she was utterly deceived. His changeable moods were incomprehensible.

"I will serve you to the best of my ability, Miss Deane," he exclaimed. "We must hope for a speedy rescue, and I am inured to exposure. It is otherwise with you. Are you ready for the climb?"

The crest of the hill was tree covered, and they could see nothing beyond their immediate locality until the sailor found a point higher than the rest, where a rugged collection of hard basalt and the uprooting of some poun trees provided an open space elevated above the ridge.

For a short distance the foothold was precarious. Jenks helped the girl in this part of the climb. His strong, gentle grasp gave her confidence. She was flushed with exertion when they stood together on the summit of this elevated perch. They could look to every point of the compass except a small section on the southwest. Here the trees rose behind them until the brow of the precipice was reached.

The emergence into a sunlit panorama of land and sea, though expected, was profoundly entrancing. They appeared to stand almost exactly in the center of the island, which was crescent shaped. It was no larger than the sailor had estimated. The new slopes now revealed were covered with verdure down to the very edge of the water, which for nearly a mile seaward broke over jagged reefs. The sea looked strangely calm from this height. Irregular blue patches on the horizon to south and east caught the man's first glance. He unslinged the binoculars he still carried and focused them eagerly.

"Islands," he cried, "and big ones too!"

"How odd!" whispered Iris, more concerned in the scrutiny of her immediate surroundings. Jenks glanced at her sharply. She was not looking at the islands, but at a curious hollow, a quarry-like depression beneath them to the right, distant about 300 yards and not far removed from the small plateau containing the well, though isolated from it by the south angle of the main cliff.

Here, in a great circle, there was not a vestige of grass, shrub or tree, nothing save brown rock and sand. At first the sailor deemed it to be the dried up bed of a small lake. This hypothesis would not serve, else it would be choked with verdure. The pit stared up at them like an ominous eye, though neither paid further attention to it, for the glorious prospect mapped at their feet momentarily swept aside all other considerations.

"What a beautiful place!" murmured Iris. "I wonder what it is called."

"Suppose we christen it Rainbow island?"

"Why Rainbow?"

"That is the English meaning of 'Iris' in Latin, you know."

"So it is. How clever of you to think of it! Tell me, what is the meaning of 'Robert' in Greek?"

Miss Iris had meant her playful retort as a mere light hearted quibble. It annoyed her, a young person of much consequence, to have her kindly condescension repelled.

"I suppose so," she agreed, "but I have gone through so much in a few hours that I am bewildered, apt to forget these nice distinctions."

Jenks was closely examining the reef on which the Sirdar struck. Some square objects were visible near the palm tree. The sun, glinting on the waves, rendered it difficult to discern their significance.

"What do you make of those?" he inquired, handing the glasses and blandly ignoring Miss Deane's petulance. Her brain was busy with other things while she twisted the binoculars to suit her vision. Rainbow island—Iris—it was a nice conceit, but "menial" struck a discordant note. This man was no menial in appearance or speech. Why was he so deliberately rude?

"I think they are boxes or packing cases," she announced.

"Ah, that was my own idea! I must visit that locality."

"How? Will you swim?"

"No," he said, his stern lips relaxing in a smile. "I will not swim, and, by the way, Miss Deane, be careful when you are near the water. The lagoon is swarming with sharks at present. I feel tolerably assured that at low tide, when the remnants of the gale have vanished, I will be able to walk there along the reef."

"Sharks!" she cried. "In there! What horrible superstition! This speak of land continents! I should not have imagined that sharks and seals could live together!"

"You are quite right," he explained, with becoming gravity. "As a rule, sharks infest only the leeward side of these islands. Just now they are attracted in shoals by the wreck."

"Oh!" Iris shivered slightly.

"We had better go back now. The wind is keen here, Miss Deane."

She knew that he purposely misunderstood her gesture. His attitude conveyed a rebuke. There was no further room for sentiment in their present excitement. They had to deal with chill necessities. As for the sailor, he was glad that the chance turn of their conversation enabled him to warn her against the lurking dangers of the lagoon. There was no need to mention the devilish now. He must spare her all available truths.

They gathered the stores from the first dining room and reached the cave without incident. Another fire was lighted, and while Iris attended to the kitchen the sailor felled several young trees. He wanted poles, and these were the right size and shape. He soon cleared a considerable space. The timber was soft and so small in girth that three cuts with the ax usually sufficed. He dragged from the beach the smallest tarpaulin he could find and propped it against the rock in such manner that it effectually screened the mouth of the cave, though admitting light and air.

He was so busy that he paid little heed to Iris. But the odor of fried ham was wafted to him. He was lifting a couple of heavy stones to stay the canvas and keep it from flapping in the wind when the girl called out:

"Wouldn't you like to have a wash before dinner?"

He straightened himself and looked at her. Her face and hands were shining, spotless. The change was so great that his brow wrinkled with perplexity.

"I am a good pupil," she cried. "You see I am already learning to help myself. I made a bucket out of one of the dish covers by slinging it in two ropes. Another dish cover, some sand and leaves supplied basin, soap and towel. I have cleaned the tin cups and the knives, and, see, here is my greatest treasure!"

She held up a small metal lamp.

"Where in the world did you find that?" he exclaimed.

"Buried in the sand inside the cave."

"Anything else?"

"His tone was abrupt. She was so disappointed by the seeming want of appreciation of her industry that a gleam of amusement died from her eyes, and she shook her head, stooping at once to attend to the toasting of some biscuits.

This time he was genuinely sorry. "Forgive me, Miss Deane," he said penitently. "My words are dictated by anxiety. I do not wish you to make discoveries on your own account. This is a strange place, you know—an unpleasant one in some respects."

"Surely I can rummage about my own cave?"

"Most certainly. It was careless of me not to have examined its interior more thoroughly."

"Then why do you grumble because I found the lamp?"

"I did not mean any such thing. I am sorry."

"I think you are horrid. If you want to wash you will find the water over there. Don't wait. The ham will be frizzled to a cinder."

Unlucky Jenks! Was ever man fated to incur such unmerited odium? He savagely laved his face and neck. The fresh, cool water was delightful at first, but when he drew near to the fire he experienced an unaccountable sensation of weakness. Could it be possible that he was going to faint? It was too absurd. He sank to the ground. Trees, rocks and sand strewn earth induged in a mad dance. Iris' voice sounded weak and indistinct. It seemed to travel in waves from a great distance. He tried to brush away from his brain these dim fancies, but his iron will, for once failed, and he pitched headlong downward into darkness.

When he recovered, the girl's left arm was around his neck. For one blissful instant he nestled there contentedly. He looked into her eyes and saw that she was crying. A gust of anger rose within him that he should be the cause of those tears.

He tried to rise.

"Oh! Are you better?" Her lips quivered pitifully.

"Yes. What happened? Did I faint?"

"Drink this."

She held a cup to his mouth, and he obediently strove to swallow the contents. It was champagne. After the first spasm of terror and when the application of water to his face failed to restore consciousness Iris had knocked the head off the bottle of champagne.

He quickly revived. Nature had only given him a warning that he was over-drawing his resources. He was deeply humiliated. He did not conceive the

truth, that only a strong man could do all that he had done and live. For thirty-six hours he had not slept. During part of the time he fought with wilder beasts than they knew at Epheesus. The long exposure to the sun, the mental strain of his foreboding that the charming girl whose life depended upon him might be exposed to even worse dangers than any yet encountered, the physical labor he had undergone, the irksome restraint he strove to place upon his conduct and utterances—all these things culminated in utter relaxation when the water touched his heated skin.

"How could you frighten me so?" demanded Iris hysterically. "You must have felt that you were working too hard. You made me rest. Why didn't you rest yourself?"

He looked at her wistfully. This collapse must not happen again for her sake. These two said more with eyes than lips. She withdrew her arm. Her face and neck crimsoned.

"Good gracious!" she cried. "The ham is ruined!"

It was burnt black. She prepared a fresh supply. When it was ready Jenks was himself again. They ate in silence and shared the remains of the bottle. A smile illumined his tired face.

Iris was watchful. She had never in her life cooked even a potato or boiled an egg. The ham was her first attempt.

"My cooking amuses you?" she demanded coquettishly.

"It gratifies every sense," he murmured. "There is but one thing needful to complete my happiness."

"And that is?"

"Permission to smoke."

"Smoke what?"

He produced a steel box tightly closed and a pipe.

"Your pockets are absolute shops," said the girl, delighted that his temper had improved. "What other stores do you carry about with you?"

He lit his pipe and solemnly gave an inventory of his worldly goods. Beyond the items she had previously seen he could only enumerate a silver dollar, a very soiled and crumpled handkerchief and a bit of tin. A box of Norwegian matches he threw away as useless, but Iris recovered them.

"You never know what purpose they may serve," she said. In after days a weird significance was attached to this simple phrase.

"Why do you carry about a bit of tin?" she went on.

"I found it here, Miss Deane," he answered.

Luckily she interpreted "here" as applying to the cave.

"Let me see it, May I?"

He handed it to her. She could make nothing of it, so together they puzzled over it. The sailor rubbed it with a mixture of kerosene and sand. Then figures and letters and a sort of diagram were revealed. At last they became decipherable. By exercising patient ingenuity some one had indicated the metal with a sharp pencil until the marks assumed this aspect:

Iris was quick-witted. "It is a plan of the island," she cried.

"Also the latitude and the longitude." "What does J. S. mean?"

"Probably the initials of a man's name. Let us say John Smith, for instance."

"And the figures on the island, with the 'X' and the dot?"

"I cannot tell you at present," he said. "I take it that the line across the island signifies this gap or canyon, and the small intersecting line the cave. But 32 divided by 1 and an 'X' surmounted by a dot are cabalistic. They would cause even Sherlock Holmes to smoke at least two pipes. I have barely started one."

"It looks quite mysterious, like the things you read of in stories of pirates and buried treasure."

"Yes," he admitted. "It is unquestionably a plan, a guidance, given to a person not previously acquainted with the island, but cognizant of some fact connected with it. Unfortunately none of the buccaners I can bring to mind frequented these seas. The poor beggar who left it here must have had some other motive than searching for a cache."

"Did he dig the cave and the well, I wonder?"

"Probably the former, but not the well. No man could do it unaided."

"Why do you assume he was alone?"

He stroiled toward the fire to kick a stray log. "It is only idle speculation at the best, Miss Deane," he replied. "Would you like to help me to drag some timber up from the beach? If we get a few big planks we can build a fire that will last for hours. We want some extra clothes, too, and it will soon be dark."

The request for co-operation gratified her. She complied eagerly, and without much exertion they hauled a respectable load of firewood to their new camping ground. They also brought a number of coats to serve as coverings. Then Jenks tackled the lamp. It was a most difficult operation to open it.

Before the sun went down he succeeded and made a wick by unraveling a few strands of wool from his jersey. When night fell, with the suddenness of the tropics, Iris was able to illuminate her small domain.

They were both utterly tired and ready to drop with fatigue. The girl said "good night," but so faintly reappeared from behind the tarpaulin.

"Am I to keep the lamp alight?" she inquired.

"Please yourself, Miss Deane. Better not, perhaps. It will only burn four or five hours anyway."

Soon the light vanished, and he lay down, his pipe between his teeth, close to the cave's entrance. Weary though he was he could not sleep forthwith. His mind was occupied with the signs on the canvas head.

"32 divided by 1: an 'X' and a dot," he repeated several times. "What do they signify?"

Suddenly he sat up, with every sense alert, and grabbed his revolver. Something impelled him to look toward the spot, a few feet away, where the skeleton was hidden. It was the rustling of a bird among the trees that had caught his ear.

He thought of the white framework of a once powerful man, lying there, among the bushes, abandoned, forgotten, horrible. Then he smothered a cry of surprise.

"By Jove!" he muttered. "There is no 'X' and dot. That sign is meant for a skull and crossbones. It lies exactly on the peak of the island where we saw that queer looking bald patch today. First thing tomorrow before the girl awakes I must examine that place."

He resolutely stretched himself on his share of the spread out coats, now thoroughly dried by sun and fire. In a minute he was sound asleep.

**CHAPTER V.**

**H**IS awake to find the sun high in the heavens. Iris was preparing breakfast; a fine fire was crackling cheerfully, and the presiding goddess had so altered her appearance that the sailor surveyed her with astonishment.

He noiselessly assumed a sitting posture, tucked his feet beneath him and blinked. The girl's face was not visible from where he sat, and for a few seconds he thought he must surely be dreaming. She was attired in a neat navy blue dress and smart blouse. Her white canvas shoes were replaced by strong leather boots. She was quite spick and span, this island Hebe.

So soundly had he slept that his senses returned but slowly. At last he guessed what had happened. She had risen with the dawn and, conquering her natural feeling of repulsion, selected from the store he accumulated yesterday some more suitable garments than those in which she escaped from the wreck.

He quietly took stock of his own tattered condition and passed a reflective hand over the stubble on his chin. In a few days his face would resemble a scrubbing brush. In that mournful moment he would have exchanged even his pipe and tobacco box, worth untold gold, for shaving tusk. Who can say why his thoughts took such trend? Twenty-four hours can effect great changes in the human mind if controlling influences are active.

Then came a sharp revulsion of feeling. His name was Robert—a menial. He reached for his boots, and Iris heard him.

"Good morning," she cried, smiling sweetly. "I thought you would never awake. I suppose you were very, very tired. Please wash quickly. The eggs will be hard."

"Eggs?"

"Yes, I made a collection among the trees. I tasted one of a lot that looked good. It was the first moral courage to begin the day with a rebuke. She was irrepressible, but she really must not do these things. He smothered a sigh in the improvised basin which was placed ready for him.

Miss Deane had prepared a capital meal. Of course the ham and biscuits still bulked large in the bill of fare, but there were boiled eggs, fried bananas and an elderly coconut. These things, supplemented by clear, cold water, were not so bad for a couple of castaways hundreds of miles from everywhere.

For the life of him the man could not refrain from displaying the conversational art in which he excelled. Their talk dealt with Italy, Egypt, India. He spoke with the ease of culture and enthusiasm. Once he slipped into anecdote apropos of the helplessness of British soldiers in any matter outside the scope of the king's regulations.

"I remember," he said, "seeing a cavalry subaltern and the members of an escort sitting half starved on a number of bags piled up in the Sukin desert. And what do you think were in the bags?"

"I don't know," said Iris, keenly alert for deductions.

"Biscuits! They thought the bags contained patent fodder until I enlightened them."

It was on the tip of her tongue to pounce on him with the comment, "Then you have been an officer in the army." But she forbore. She had guessed this earlier. Yet the mischievous light in her eyes defied control. He was warned in time and pulled himself up short.

"You read my face like a book," she cried.

"No printed page was ever so legible. Now, Miss Deane, we have gossiped too long. I am a laggard this morning, but before starting work I have a few serious remarks to make."

"More digs?" she inquired saucily.

"I repudiate 'digs.' In the first place, you must not make any more experiments in the matter of food. The eggs were a wonderful effort; but, flattered by success, you may poison yourself."

"Secondly?"

"You must never pass out of my sight without carrying a revolver, not so much for defense, but as a signal. Did you take one when you went bird's nesting?"

"No. Why?"

There was a troubled look in his eyes when he answered:

"It is best to tell you at once that before help reaches us we may be visited by cruel and bloodthirsty savages. I would not even mention this if it were a remote contingency. As matters stand, you ought to know that such a thing may happen. Let us trust in God's goodness that assistance may come soon. The island has seemingly been deserted for many months, and therein lies our best chance of escape. But I am obliged to warn you lest you should be taken unawares."

Iris was serious enough now.

"How do you know that such danger threatens us?" she demanded.

He countered readily. "Because I happen to have read a good deal about the China sea and its frequenters," he said. "I am the last man in the world to alarm you needlessly. All I mean to convey is that certain precautions should be taken against a risk that is possible, not probable. No more."

She could not repress a shudder. The sailor wanted to tell her that he would defend her against a host of savages if he were endowed with many lives, but he was perforce tongue-tied. He even reviled himself for having spoken, but she saw the anguish in his face, and her woman's heart acknowledged him as her protector, her shield.

"Mr. Jenks," she said simply, "we are in God's hands. I put my trust in him and in you. I am hopeful—more, confident. I thank you for what you have done, for all that you will do. If you cannot preserve me from threatening perils no man could, for you are as brave and gallant a gentleman as lives on the earth today."

Now, the strange feature of this extraordinary and unexpected outburst of pent up emotion was that the girl pronounced his name with the slightly emphasized accentuation of one who knew it to be a mere disguise. The man was so taken aback by her declaration of faith that the minor incident, though it did not escape him, was smothered in a tumult of feeling.

He could not trust himself to speak. He rose hastily and seized the ax to deliver a murderous assault upon a sage palm that stood close at hand.